

## EMOTIONAL (UN)WELLNESS IN LEARNING SPEAKING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*Emotional (un)wellness in the time of learning speaking among university students is recognized as an important issue, thus more data on students' psychological problems level and effective strategies to overcome such problems are needed. All enrolled 2nd semester students from English Education Department at the University of Mataram were invited to complete an online-based survey. The psychological problems were assessed using qualitative method. Results showed that the psychological problems encountered by the students included: anxiety (62%, High), fear of making mistakes (54%, Moderate), feeling embarrassed (48%, Moderate), lack of confidence (51%, Moderate), and lack of motivation (19%). Leading psychological problem is anxiety that comprises more than one tenth percent of the total problems. The main causes of the problems were associated with: fear of negative responses from the classmates, fear of sounding silly when speaking, and feeling embarassed to speak. In coping with these problems, the students preferred to use talk-to-the-mirror and talk-to-a-friend methods. Despite the many problems, majority of the students have very low demotivation level (19%), meaning that they have very high motivation to learn, to participate and to improve their speaking competence in learning speaking (81%). These results provide evidence that psychological problems in learning speaking among university students do exist. They also highlight the need for serious efforts to overcome the problems.*

**Keywords:** *Psychological Problem, Emotional Wellness, Speaking Anxiety*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult aspects of learning English is speaking. Speaking, according to Rickheit and Strohner (2008), is speech or utterances with the objective of being distinguished by the speaker, and the recipient processes the expressions to acknowledge of the speaker's intentions. Speaking is the first mode in which children learn language, it is a part of most people's everyday involvement with language

practices, and it is the primary driver of language transition, according to Oller and Eilers (2002). People who want to master a language should practice communicating with it, and speaking is one of the skills that can be used to do so.

Moreover, developing speaking skill is important in language learning. Speaking is almost certainly a main concern for the majority of learners of English (Florez, 1999). Learning speaking in English is essential in view of the fact that it helps people acquire the speaking skill to communicate in a spontaneous and natural way with other people. Burkart and Sheppard (2004) stated that the triumph in gaining knowledge of a language is determined by the capacity to attain a conversation in the target language. Furthermore, speaking skill could be a support for other skills. The research by Gass and Varonis (1994) has considered oral interaction as an important factor in the shaping of the learner's developing language. In example, it was showed that learning how to be able to have a good command of speaking can facilitate people to improve their reading comprehension ability (Hilferty, 2005), developing their writing skill (Trachsel & Severino, 2004) as well as developing their listening skill (Regina, 1997).

Although learning speaking has many advantages, there are also many problems that arise. According Ur (1996), some factors that are known to have caused difficulties speaking in English, such as "inhibition", "nothing to say", "low or uneven participation", and "L1 use". Some of these issues are linked to "the learners", "the teaching strategies", "the curriculum", and "the environment" (Rabab'ah, 2005). For instance, some learners with low vocabulary skill easily lose track of their interaction or cannot keep the interaction going. The other common factors that hinder students from speaking are psychological problems; such as "anxiety" or "shyness", "lack of confidence", "lack of motivation", and "fear of mistakes" (Nunan, 1999).

Regarding to psychological problem, it is a condition characterized by "abnormal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors". At the time behaviour is deviant, distressful, and dysfunctional, both psychiatrists and psychologists describe it as "disordered" (Comer, 2004). In the research by MacIntyre (1998), it is found that there are 5 (five) psychological issues in learning speaking, those are, "fear of making

mistakes”, “shyness”, “anxiety”, “lack of confidence”, and “lack of motivation”. Self-confidence is the one that significantly contributes to overcome the psychological problems mentioned above. The other features that give effect to such problems are “motivation”, “personality”, and “intergroup climate”. People with low self-confidence are identified to having low self-efficacy being influenced by the reaction that they are “stupid”, “worthless”, and not as “bright” as the other. They are not aware that other people are also facing the same problems. Brown (2001) argued that several psychological issues such as “shyness” and “anxiety” are the main factors of students’ hesitation to talk.

Considering the vital role of psychological wellness in learning speaking, therefore, conducting a study that investigated the psychological problems encountered by the university students of English Education Program in learning speaking is of a great importance.

## RESEARCH METHOD

To achieve the goals of the present study, we used qualitative descriptive approach that focused on investigating the psychological issues encountered by the students of English education department. It also sought to find out the main causes of the so-called psychological problems. As suggested in Creswell (1998), as researchers, we took the main part in data collection and worked to compile words, to analyze them inductively, and to observe the utterances uttered by the participants.

The survey questions were divided into 3 sections: Section 1 questioned about the psychological problems encountered by the students in learning speaking; Section 2 questioned about the students’ strategies to overcome their psychological problems; and Section 3 questioned about the students’ expectations for their future English-speaking classes. **Section 1** contained 25 Yes/No questions related to the psychological problems in learning speaking that included: “anxiety”, “fear of making mistakes”, “shyness”, “confidence”, and “motivation”. **Section 2** contained 2 open-ended questions that asked about the strategies on how students overcame their

psychological problems. Lastly, **Section 3** contained 1 question that asked about the students' expectations for their future English speaking classes.

To determine the level of respondents' psychological problems in learning speaking, the mean scores of their responses were computed and interpreted using **Table 1** below. Score ranges with the level of students' psychological problems in learning speaking (**Table 1**) are interpreted into: "very low" psychological problem level (Score 0-19); "low" psychological problem level (Score 20-39); "moderate" psychological problem level (Score 40-59); "high" psychological problem level (Score 60-79); and "very high" psychological problem level (Score 80-100).

**Table 1.** Score Range of Students' Psychological Problems in Learning Speaking

Score Range (% of 'Yes' responses)	Psychological Problems in Learning Speaking Level
0 - 19	Very Low
20 - 39	Low
40 - 59	Moderate
60 - 79	High
80-100	Very High

The survey was conducted for 1 week and distributed using Google Forms online survey. The total valid respondents participating in the survey was 50 persons.

## RESULTS

This section discusses about the level of students' psychological problems in learning speaking that included student's "anxiety level", "shyness level", "fear-of-making-mistake level", "confidence level", and "motivation level".

**Table 2.** Students' Speaking Anxiety Level

No.	Indicators	N	'Yes' Responses (%)	Intrepretations
1	Do you feel inferior towards your classmates?	50	56	Moderate
2	Do you feel nervous every time you face an English-speaking examination?	50	70	High
3	Do you ever think your friends will be making fun of your pronunciation or your lecturer is going to yell at you because you cannot speak English?	50	56	Moderate
4	Have you ever felt upset and sweated much that made you forget what to say, despite having been studying for it every day?	50	62	High
5	Do you often feel less fluent than you really are when you are speaking English?	50	82	Very High
<b>Average</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>High</b>

In speaking anxiety (**Table 2**), the students' anxiety level varies from moderate to very high anxiety. Students are highly anxious when they worry about: (i) their speaking fluency (82%), (ii) speaking examination (70%), (iii) their upset feeling and sweating that make them forget what to say (62%). However, students are moderately anxious about: (i) the feeling of less superior to other students; and that (ii) they are worried being mocked by other students and the lecturer. In average, the students' anxiety level in learning speaking is **high**. Most of the respondents feel less fluent than they really are when they are speaking English in the classroom. The nervousness and the lack of self-esteem were some of the factors of why they feel that way. The feeling of being inferior, upset stomach and sweat much when speaking in the classroom is also indicating the anxiety problems.

**Table 3.** Students' Fear of Making Mistakes Level

No.	Indicators	N	% of 'Yes' Responses	Interpretations
1	Are you afraid to speak English in the speaking class?	50	46	Moderate
2	Are you afraid of being corrected by your lecturer in front of your classmates in English speaking-classes?	50	38	Low
3	Are you scared of making errors when it comes to speaking English?	50	68	High
4	Are you afraid of sounding silly in front of your classmates in English speaking class?	50	70	High
5	Do you care when your classmates mocking your English pronunciation?	50	50	Moderate
<b>Average</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

In fear of making mistakes (**Table 3**), the students' fear level also varies from low to high level. Students are highly afraid about: (i) sounding silly in front of their classmates (70%) and (ii) making errors when speaking (68%). Students are moderately fear of making mistakes to hear their classmates mock their pronunciation. Nevertheless, students are not afraid or do not feel offended when the lecturer give them corrections before their classmates (38%). In average, the students' fear of making mistakes level in learning speaking is **moderate** (54%).

**Table 4.** Students' Shyness Level

No	Indicators	N	% of 'Yes' Responses	Interpretations
1	Are you a quiet and shy person?	50	36	Low
2	Do you feel shy to deliver your messages and thoughts in English speaking class?	50	68	High
3	Have you ever been asked something by your lecturer but you were not giving any answer?	50	34	Low
4	Do you find speaking English in front of your classmates intimidating?	50	40	Moderate
5	Do you feel hesitate to communicate your best speaking performance in the English speaking-class?	50	64	High
<b>Average</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

In students' speaking shyness as shown in **Table 4** above, the level also fluctuates from low to high. Students are highly shy about: (i) delivering their messages and thoughts (68%) and hesitate (ii) to communicate their best speaking performance (64%). Students are moderately shy when they feel the situaton in the

classroom intimidating for them (40%). Nevertheless, as personals, students are not typical of shy and quiet persons, meaning that they are (i) pretty good at interacting and winning friends (60%) and (ii) will actively respond to the lecturer's questions (66%). In average, the students' shyness level in learning speaking is **moderate** (48%).

**Table 5.** Students' Speaking Inconfidence Level

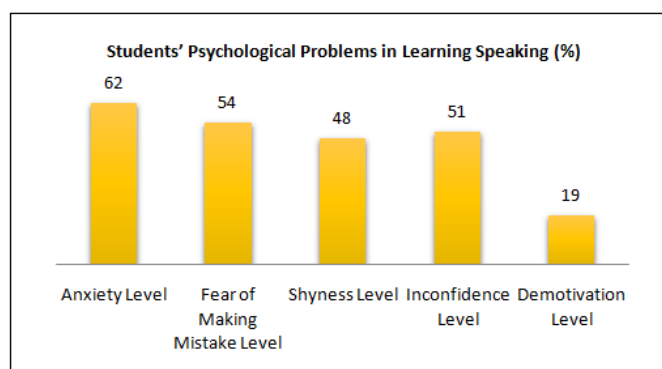
No	Indicators	N	% of 'Yes' Responses	Interpretations
1	Do you feel inconfident with your English-speaking performance?	50	54	Moderate
2	Do you doubt your speaking ability?	50	70	High
3	Do you think you have low ability to communicate in English?	50	68	High
4	Do you feel difficult to understand your classmates when talking in English?	50	6	Very Low
5	Do you choose to keep quiet rather than respond or mingle in a group conversation with other students?	50	58	Moderate
<b>Average</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

In speaking inconfidence (**Table 5**), the students' speaking inconfidence level differs from very low to high. Students are highly doubting about: (i) their speaking ability (70%) and highly inconfident about (ii) their ability to communicate in English (68%). Moreover, students are moderately inconfident about (i) mingling in a group conversation with other students (58%) and about (ii) their speaking performance (54%). Nevertheless, students are very confident they have the ability to understand their classmates when talking in English (6%). In average, the students' confidence level in learning speaking is **moderate** (51%).

**Table 6.** Students' Speaking Demotivation Level

No	Questions	N	% of 'Yes' Responses	Interpretations
1	Do you feel demotivated to learn in English speaking-class?	50	2	Very Low
2	Do you feel lazy to know more about the speaking materials?	50	16	Very Low
3	Do you ever feel bored in English speaking-class?	50	16	Very Low
4	Do you confuse about the speaking materials given by the lecturer?	50	20	Very Low
5	Do you ever feel not wanting to go to English speaking class?	50	40	High
<b>Average</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Very Low</b>

In speaking demotivation (**Table 6**), the students' speaking demotivation level contrasts from low to very low demotivation. Students have very low demotivation level about (i) learning in English speaking class (2%), (ii) knowing more information about the speaking materials/topics (16%), (iii) feeling bored about being in the speaking class (16%), (iv) feeling confused about the speaking materials/topics provided by the lecturer (20%), and (v) feeling of not wanting to go to English speaking class (40%). In average, the students' speaking demotivation level is very low (19%). In other words, students are highly motivated to attend, to actively participate, and to further know more information about the materials in English speaking class (81%).



**Figure 1.** Students' Psychological Problems in Learning Speaking (by Category)

As to the overall of students' psychological problems in learning speaking as shown in **Figure 1**, on top of that students are highly problematic with their anxiety (62%) and moderately do have issues with: (i) fear of making mistakes (54%), (ii) inconfidence (51%), and shyness (48%). Despite the fact that the four types do contribute to students' psychological problems in learning speaking, students have very low demotivation level that comprises only 19% of the total 'Yes' responses. Meaning that the students have very high motivation (81%) to learn, to actively participate, and to know more about the topics of speaking materials given by the lecturer, as opposed to demotivation level.

**Table 7.** Students' Strategies to Reduce Psychological Problems in Learning Speaking

No	Strategies	% of Responses
1	Practicing English in front of the mirror, talking with other friends in English.	26
2	Singing songs, watching videos, reading novels/comics, listening to the recordings.	20
3	Learning and memorizing more vocabulary and topics for speaking.	22
4	Enjoying the classroom atmosphere, not paying too much attention on other classmates, keep sticking with the current pronunciation and vocabulary.	20
5	Doing nothing.	12

In strategies to overcome the psychological problems in learning speaking (**Table 7**), students preferred to use: (i) talk-to-the-mirror and talk-with-other-friend methods which is the most dominant strategy (26%), followed by (ii) learning and memorizing more vocabulary and topics for speaking (22%), (iii) singing songs, watching videos, reading novels /comics, and listening to recordings in English (20%), and (iv) enjoying the atmosphere in the class, not paying attention too much on other classmates (20%). 12% of the respondents had no idea about how to overcome the psychological problems they were facing.

## DISCUSSION

### What Are the Psychological Problems Faced by Students in Learning Speaking?

Based on the findings, it was found that in learning speaking, most of the respondents experienced psychological issues such as anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Lack of motivation is the only psychological problem that does not seem to be experienced by the majority, though it needs to be further researched.

In **anxiety issue (Table 2)**, 41 respondents (82%) feel less fluent than they really are, the most percentage in the anxiety level, which is in line with Nascente's (2001) commentary about anxiety that "anxiety stands out as one of the main blocking factors for effective language learning".

In **fear of making mistake issue (Table 3)**, 35 respondents (70%) are afraid of sounding silly in front of their classmates, the most percentage in fear of making mistakes issue. In line with Aftat (2008) that suggested that fear is related to correction and negative evaluations.

In feeling of **shyness issue (Table 4)**, the most problematic issue among the respondents goes to the feeling shyness when delivering thoughts and messages in the speaking classes (68%). Speaking in front of a group of people is one of the most popular phobias among students, according to Baldwin (2011), who believes that shyness causes their minds to go blank or that they will forget what to say.

In **feeling of inconfidence issue (Table 5)**, the most problematic issue goes to the feeling of doubt about the speaking ability (70%), that is in accordance with He and Chen's (2010) commentary that the key cause of students' lack of confidence is their inability to communicate well in English.

In **demotivation issue (Table 6)**, almost half of the respondents feel lazy to attend the English speaking classes. According to Nunan (1999), uninspired teaching, boredom, a lack of perceived importance of materials, and a lack of awareness about the instructional program's goals are the causes of students' lack of motivation or demotivation. In average, in spite of the many issues surrounding students' in their learning speaking, they are still highly motivated to attend, to actively participate, and to know more about the speaking topic or materials assigned by the lecturer as shown by the average percentage of demotivation level which is very low at 19%. Meaning that the motivation level (as opposed to demotivation level) is very high at 81%.

### **What Are the Solutions to Overcome Students' Psychological Problems in Learning Speaking?**

In strategies to overcome students' psychological problems in learning speaking (**Table 7**), respondents proposed a number of solutions to condense their psychological problems in learning speaking. 10 respondents (20%) replied that they frequently use singing in English, watching English videos, reading English comics or

novels, and listening to English recording methods to cope with the problems. 13 respondents (26%) replied that they regularly practice speaking English by talking in front of the mirror or talking with their friends in English. 11 respondents (22%) replied that they learn and memorize more vocabulary and topics frequently used for effective speaking. 10 respondents (20%) use chilling out strategy by enjoying the atmosphere in the classroom, not paying too much attention to their friends' bullying or mockery since that will discourage them from speaking well, and keep sticking with the pronunciation despite having the native-unlikeness issue. Lastly, it was found that one fifth (1/5) of the respondents had no idea whatsoever about how to overcome their psychological problems (12%). Meaning that they have never had any concern on how to solve the problems and try to find the best of remedy that can help them improve their speaking competence.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, the psychological issues encountered by the 2nd semester students of the English Education Department in learning speaking are related with "anxiety", "shyness", "fear of making mistakes", "lack of confidence", and "lack of motivation" concerns. While "anxiety", "shyness", "fear of making mistakes", and "lack of confidence" are the most common problems among students, lack of motivation is never an issue to them. The majority of the students have high motivation to learn and participate in the English speaking classes (81%). Students develop their own strategies in effort to solve their psychological problems in learning speaking. The most common strategies used and turn out to be effective for the students are talking-to-the-mirror and talking-with-friends methods.

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